

Chairman's report, season 2008

I'd like to start my inaugural Chairman's report with one word: RAIN. That's certainly my over-riding memory of season 2008. My own club, Poloc, suffered no fewer than 87 cancellations or abandonments - an extraordinary number; in fact I wouldn't have thought we had that many games scheduled in a season, never mind could see that many washed out. As I say: extraordinary.

And rain affected much of the season as regards junior cricket too, in particular the junior leagues. Congratulations are, of course, due to the league winners - but also to clubs' junior convenors who got as many games played as they did - 288 in total. But to put into perspective just how wet it was, 288 games played was 16% fewer than the 344 played in 2007. Yup, it rained a lot.

And there's no doubt that the weather played a part in who won what in season 2008. With the league rules as they are, getting games played is usually a key to finishing higher up the table than otherwise, and season 2008 simply re-emphasised this. Again my own club's fortunes reflect this well. Playing more games than any other club in the 18s brought a share of the title despite losing four matches, whereas the unbeaten 15s ended up third as game after game was washed away. There's no easy answer to ensuring a leveler playing field in this regard: to replay or not to replay, that is the question! Percentages or points? The debate will rage on, whether in senior cricket or junior cricket.

Congratulations to league winners nonetheless - even to Clydesdale, who returned to title winning ways in two of the leagues after a sabbatical in 2007!

Turning to cup competitions: it was good for the West that Clydesdale were also national under 13 knockout cup winners - congratulations again, then, to the Dark Side, and you know how hard that is for anyone from Europe's Best Park to say! Also successful in cup competition were Greenock, who won the Frank Smith Trophy, defeating 2007 winners Prestwick in a good match at Shawholm, on one of the few good days of the summer.

Talk of the Frank Smith Trophy brings me to the subject of sponsorship, and we were delighted that Surridge@Scoreboard again sponsored the trophy, providing winner, runner-up and man of the match prizes. Thanks are due to Alan MacCartney and his team at Surridge in Kinning Park for their partnership with the junior union over the last three years, something that has helped re-invigorate the trophy. The union was also successful in attracting a league sponsor for the first time in many years. Thanks in this regard are due to the efforts of my Vice-Chairman, Richard Rutnagur of Ferguslie, who negotiated The Trophy Centre's sponsorship, a sponsorship that brought in valuable funding to the union, and attractive discounts for clubs. A valid question from some at this juncture might well be: "So what happens to such money?" One answer is that resources are used to assist junior players in their development, something that was done in early 2008 with the funding support provided to Willie Rowan of Prestwick who "wintered" in Australia.

Looking beyond the leagues and cup competitions, a number of our clubs' junior players also won national representative honours. At under 19 level Willie Rowan, Dave Stafford, Scott Dalgleish and Greg Cameron represented Scotland. At 17s Anjun Luthra and Willie Rowan, again, were selected. And at 15s Andrew Umeed and Sean Docherty featured. There are now no longer Scotland under 12 or 13 teams. Congratulations to these players - whilst it's not the be-all-and-end-all to have the district's players win such representative honours, it is correct to acknowledge this success when it happens.

Elsewhere in representative cricket the inter-area championships were played through rainy days in the middle of summer: Dumfries & Galloway winning at under 15, whilst the Sharks - an appropriate name given the watery conditions - were winners of the under 13 competition. Then, in the inaugural Scottish State Schools Twenty20 tournament held at New Williamfield, Strathclyde Schools, drawing their players from the union's clubs, were victorious. Again congratulations to these winners.

2008 was also the first year of the new Academy system. Whilst very much a Cricket Scotland initiative, the Western Academy impacted the district in that the old age-group inter-district championships were done away with. The Academy had three intakes: under 14, 16 and 18. Each participated in inter-academy matches in the season, all were badly affected by,.....you've guessed it: RAIN. In slightly artificial outcomes, none of the Western Academy teams won their tournaments, but, that said, almost no games were played! 2009, with a year under the belt, and better weather, should be a better guide to the success of the Academies. In this regard the Western Academy has seen a number of changes in recent weeks. Head Coach Simon Smith has left to take up a similar position with the Eastern Academy, and has been replaced by Iain Stewart who will add the Head Coach role to his Club Development Officer role. Tim Hart remains as Administrator, and informs me that the Academy will likely only have two intakes in 2009: at under 14 and under 16 age-groups. I am sure more detailed information on the Academy's plans for 2009 will be forthcoming to clubs in the near future. On this subject, and for your information, the Academy's exact structure and its interaction with the union remains something that is under discussion with - to borrow tennis phrase-eology - the ball being firmly in Cricket Scotland's court.

Iain Stewart has been "in post" now for just over a year and, I think I can safely say, has demonstrated great enthusiasm for the role, often working with one hand tied behind his back, limited as he is by lack of central funding, frustrated as he can be by the indifference of local authorities, and overwhelmed as he would have every right to be by the sheer geographical size of his area. The West Club Development Officer's role is a tough job, one that's been badly affected by a lack of continuity of staffing in recent years, and so we're grateful for the work Iain's done in a difficult first year, and look forward to his continued input and efforts in 2009 and - hopefully - beyond.

A final couple of observations on the year if I may, in closing: firstly, it's still of some concern that a number of clubs appear to commit to playing in a league but then fail to fulfill a number of fixtures. Secondly, 2008 saw more than one club try to sneak over-age players into age-group matches they were too old for - and I am not only talking here about the playing of "Overseas Amateurs". This, at the risk of sounding twee, is simply "not cricket". Addressing the first issue is, I think, easy. The "B" leagues are the absolutely ideal places for clubs with insufficient players in particular age-group categories to participate. Only eight players are needed for the under 13 "B" league, whilst the under 15 "B" league facilitates a number of "over-age" under 16s to play. These leagues also have the added advantage of being playable on days and dates when clubs know they will be able to field a team and/or travel to matches, thereby actually fulfilling their matches. I really would encourage clubs to carefully consider which leagues they enter teams in. Strong and competitive "B" leagues are, I would suggest, a genuinely good option for us as a union to facilitate and promote. In short, 2008 was a hard enough season for getting games played without 31 games - that's more than 10% of the number played - being conceded.

The second issue of clubs playing ineligible players, i.e. cheating, is much harder to solve; it simply comes down to individual clubs' honesty - I'll leave that one with you all.

I'll finish on a positive though: the union's under 10 "Kwik Cricket" festivals continue to be a huge success and demonstrate both the level of interest in the game at the youngest level, and the enthusiasm of young players, parents and club volunteers alike. A big thanks to all clubs who hosted and/or participated - I would recommend these to everyone.

In conclusion I'll say a few thanks: to all the junior convenors, coaches and volunteers for their hard work in a difficult season, to Jim Young for his usual efficient administration of the leagues, to Colin Dawson for his administration of the "B" leagues and the union's finances, and - finally - to everyone for their attendance here tonight.

Thank you.